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DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/WHA, DS/ITA/WHA, WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: ASEC GT KCRM
SUBJECT: GUATEMALA: RECENT SIGNIFICANT CRIME EVENTS

REF: A. GUATEMALA SPOT REPORT 03/19/2009
1B. 09 GUATEMALA 202

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: As violent crime continues to increase throughout Guatemala, the following are some of the more recent significant events, including crimes against Embassy employees and American citizen visitors. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On March 19, 2009, at approximately 0740 hours, an American citizen Embassy employee, traveling from her residence to work and within five blocks of the Embassy, was threatened at gunpoint by a man on a motorcycle who demanded her cell phone (REF. A). The employee was able to drive away from the assailant and escaped unharmed.

13. (U) On March 19, 2009, at approximately 0520 hours, the Acting Mayor of Escuintla, Lilly Mabel Garcia Najera, was assassinated by four armed men as she was leaving her home for a municipal conference. A National Civilian Police (PNC) investigation is underway and no specific motive has been determined at this time.

14. (SBU) On March 17, 2009, an American citizen visiting her boyfriend's family in a suburb of Guatemala City received a note stating that if \$5000 USD was not paid within 24 hours, the American, her boyfriend, and their two children would be killed. The RSO concluded that it was a legitimate threat by local gang members and subsequently coordinated a police escort for the family to the airport where they safely departed Guatemala for the United States.

15. (SBU) On March 13, 2009, at approximately 1030 hours, eleven visiting Michigan State University students, traveling in a contracted tourist van outside of Patulul on Route 11, were forced to stop their vehicle by several armed men in two pickup trucks. The assailants boarded their van and drove it to a nearby secluded location where they robbed all the passengers of money and electronics and then left the area. The press reported that the females in the group had been sexually assaulted, however this has not been confirmed; RSO is investigating.

16. (SBU) On the morning of March 13, 2009, it was reported that approximately fifteen armed men in four vehicles attempted to enter Colonial Oakland, a gated community with Embassy employee residences as well as the Israeli Embassy. When the two contract security guards did not immediately comply, the assailants beat the guards with rifle butts and then fled the scene. It was reported that some of the attackers had rifles, grenades, body armor, and spoke with a foreign accent (possibly Mexican), and that at least one of the assailant vehicles was armored. The motive is still unclear, but the RSO does not believe that Americans were the target.

17. (SBU) On March 12, 2009, an American citizen was kidnapped from his place of work in Guatemala City. The kidnappers initially demanded 150,000 quetzals (approximately

\$18,750 USD), but after negotiating with the family, accepted 52,000 quetzals (approximately \$6450 USD) and released the victim unharmed on March 14, 2009.

¶ 18. (SBU) On March 4, 2009, at approximately 0915 hours, an official Embassy vehicle was hit by one round of gunfire while traveling within six blocks of the Embassy (REF. B). RSO believes that the bullet that hit the Embassy vehicle was an errant round from the PNC during a felony pursuit and not intentionally directed at Embassy personnel.

¶ 19. (U) Although these are notable incidents, they are just a small sampling from a country that has been averaging seventeen homicides every day for the last six months.

McFarland